

Nearly 1,000 turn out for job fair

By Christian Giggenbach/register-herald reporter

People have a discussion during the jobs fair Saturday at Greenbrier West High School in Charmco. (Lew Whitener/the Register-Herald)

CHARMCO - Build it and they will come.

Nearly 1,000 people turned out Saturday for a job fair at Greenbrier West High School sponsored by the coal-waste burning power plant scheduled to be built in Rainelle.

"We were overwhelmed with applicants," Mike Siemiaczko, operations manager for the Western Greenbrier Co-Generation plant, said.

Officials say 300 workers will be needed to build the plant and another 100 will be employed in the day-to-day operations.

"I just came back from New York to live in West Virginia and I need work," Milton Woody, a dry-wall specialist from Leslie, said. "I have over 30 years experience, so I have the skills."

Job experience may not be a problem for Woody, but WCG officials have continually stressed that an "educational pathway" must be built in order for unskilled laborers to get the necessary training for the high-tech jobs that the \$215 million electric plant will bring to Greenbrier County. This mantra has drawn the ear of local politicians as well.

"It's absolutely critical that everyone works with the community colleges and the high schools so that the educational and training requirements will not be an obstacle for local jobs," Sen. Jesse Guills, R-Greenbrier, said Saturday. "There is enough time left now to educate people for these jobs."

Representatives from affiliated trade unions and New River Community Technical College were on hand to address any questions about job training and the trade unions were offering information on apprenticeship programs. Those unions represented Saturday were carpenters, millwrights, pipefitters, ironworkers, boilermakers, plastics and cement masons, electricians, bricklayers, painters, operating engineers, sheet metal workers and glaziers.

Jerry Huffman, who represented District Council 53 of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, said the training programs will help benefit everyone in the long run.

"Our apprenticeship programs will open up opportunities for jobs not only for this project, but for the whole region and that puts more people to work," Huffman said.

And work is exactly what the father-son duo of Jerry and Michael Edens were searching for as they stood in a long line to register for the fair. Michael, 20, attends community college in Lewisburg and Jerry, 45, said he is willing to take on new horizons in order to make a living wage.

"I would be willing to go to college if that meant I could get a good job," Jerry said.

The power plant, which would burn coal gob from nearby Anjean, is scheduled to break ground in spring of 2006.

- E-mail: cgiggenbach@register-herald.com